

## **Jacinto Maldonado Torres Oral History Interview**

### **DC Oral History Collaborative**

#### **Summary**

Local DC organizer for ROC-DC, Jacinto Maldonado Torres, reflects on his early years growing up in Mexico City alongside his brothers and sisters and looking back on the education system in Mexico, something that has inspired him to pursue a career in education in order to improve not only the school system but also combat capitalism, systems of oppression and bring about change in Mexico. As an undocumented organizer, he speaks from his lived experiences facing and fighting the challenges that current immigration policies present as well as significant changes that are happening at the local level and the changes that he hopes to bring about for the communities in Washington, D.C. through his organizing efforts but also as a future educator.

*Note: The following interview transcript has been translated to English.*

#### **Narrator Bio**

Anonymous narrator, using the pseudonym Jacinto Maldonado Torres, is a local D.C. organizer who came to Washington, DC in 2010 at the age of 15. Originally from Mexico City, Mexico, he attended D.C. public schools and recently earned an associates degree in Early Childhood Education at UDC. His involvement in the community started early when he began organizing in high school after he started attending youth empowerment meetings at Many Languages One Voice where he became aware of his rights as a student and as an immigrant. He also learned about the disparities in the level of education and access to opportunities for himself, his peers, and other immigrants across the district. He wants to empower others to do the same, and as his roles expanded in a number of campaigns, including Cancel Rent and Excluded Workers, he has been using popular education as a primary tool for change. He also points to important changes in organizing as well as a shifting narrative regarding Dreamers.

Narrator: Anonymous narrator, Jacinto Maldonado Torres

Project: Hola Cultura - Dreamers: our voices and dreams

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Interviewer: Delia Beristain Noriega, Norma Sorto, Jose Mendoza

Interview Location: Zoom Meetings

Interview Length: 02:37:02

Neighborhoods Mentioned: Columbia Heights, Mexico City, Puebla, Iztapalapa, Chapultepec, Hidalgo, San Buenaventura, Mount Pleasant

Delia Beristain Noriega: The other thing that I wanted to ask before we get started, I know you asked us that you want to remain anonymous, is that still the case?

Jacinto Maldonado Torres: Yes.

DBN: Okay, and you give us permission to use the audio of the interview, correct?

JMT: Yeah.

DBN: But you said you're not comfortable with using the video of the interview, correct?

JMT: Yeah, that is the only thing I am not... Not the video but yes the audio.

DBN: Ok, that is fine. I just wanted to get that out of the way and just welcome you and thank you for participating in this project. It really does mean a lot to us and especially for these types of projects, I think it is important to recognize that it's not just about representation, right, it goes beyond that; it's about our histories being excluded for a long time. And we hope that with this project in particular we can start to build that history up. So I just wanted to start from the beginning. Can you tell us when and where you were born and maybe a little bit about what your hometown was like?

AI: Okay, well I am from Mexico City. I don't know how to describe my hometown right now because it has been changing a lot and a lot of the things that I remember are completely different from now. I have been watching a lot of videos just to get familiar with everything and all that kind of brings me nostalgia. My hometown reminds me of almost like D.C, but not exactly. There is more culture, there is more movement, people are way too friendly. You go outside and they say, "Hey, good morning" or if it's at night they say, "good night", and that is something that I grew up with my parents and my friends and at school. There were teachers who all the time, even if sometimes you don't know the person but if you are walking and you pass by the person you say, "good morning" or "good night" or just say "hi", just to get familiar or get to know the people around you. It has been like maybe five years, maybe like in 2010 or 2011. So yeah, D.C in 2011 it looks like it looks right now in Mexico City. So yeah, it's a little bit like hard to remember too. It is a hard question. I don't know how to describe my hometown, my city.

DBN: Well, you said that there is more culture, right? Can you tell us a bit more on what you are referring to with more culture, what are the elements of culture from Mexico that you have seen or the ones that you remember from when you were over there?

JMT: Yeah, a lot of the culture I saw was street art, painters, a lot of cycling and that is what I also call culture, right, the form that they incorporate their sports with culture, because there was cycling, there were competitions, or there are competitions still. There is street theater, like I was

saying, a lot of concerts in the streets too. One of the things that has left a mark in me is that there is a street market, I don't know if you are familiar with them, there was a street market named, El Chopo [00:05:00] and it was one the biggest street markets of the city and it would specialize in rock culture. Therefore it was more for punk or skate, more punk, therefore more rock. In that street market you could see that the majority of the people were young and this happened every Sunday and they would invite different bands. That was one of the first times in which I was introduced to rock music and I really liked it. Those types of cultures you cannot see here, there are no street markets here, here in Columbia Heights I see it like a mini street market. I don't know if you have passed through Irving Street, where Bank of America is, there are several small stands of street vendors. They sell food and sometimes other small things, but I see it that way. It is a form of bringing culture and sharing that culture here since there really is nothing here. It looks so plain. Another thing that I saw in Mexico were those art workshops that were free for everyone, and they were called, I forget the name of those places. It was there where I learned or they started to show me to play the guitar. I don't know how to play it, but I was introduced. I learned to weld and I was doing different metallics and at the same time in other places there were theatre workshops or dance workshops and also, every Sunday they would bring music, bands, and in this place the sur genre would take over. One of the music bands that I found and I still like now is called, Señor Bikini, this was so cool, listening to them and being surrounded by bands, with music and with persons. Another thing was, I am not sure if you have heard of the Chapultepec Forest, there are a lot of street clowns there and they are very entertaining. But they are also a bit annoying, they try to involve people in every act.

DBN: You said that that you were first introduced to rock culture in the street markets, right? Around what year did this happen exactly?

JMT: I don't remember exactly but I think it was around 2005 or 2004, I was finishing elementary. I was like nine or ten around that time. Actually, my brothers like rock, they would go to small concerts called "toquines", that's how they would call them, close to where we lived. My brother had a small box, I don't remember what it is called, it was like a small disk player in form of a cassette player and that is how I would listen to music before, with my brother's disc player.

DBN: Speaking of your brothers, how many brothers do you have, what age are they, are all of you from the same place?

JMT: Yes, well in total we are six. [00:10:00] I have five more siblings, we are four boys and two girls. My parents are from Puebla, they both are from Puebla, I think that my mom is originally from Hidalgo city and she moved to Puebla when she was small and she stayed there. My dad is from Puebla from a place called San Buenaventura, it is located in the surroundings of the Popocatepetl Volcano. The city where he is from and the city where my mom was born are

like five minutes away before you enter a zone surrounded by mountains, most of the volcanoes are located there. I do not remember what the place is called, I just remember that it is called, San Buenaventura or San Valentin, but what I do remember is that there are a lot of churches all over the place. But yes, they decided to immigrate to Mexico when they were around 19 or 18 years old. My dad decided to immigrate to Mexico City because he found better opportunities than the ones, he had in the small town he lived in. He decided to immigrate and start his career as a meat butcher, and I call it career because it is a career, he is a businessman, he had to learn everything, talking to persons, cutting meat, negotiating, doing different things, therefore he was exposed to the businessman life. From there, I think he brought my mom or my mom moved to the city, I can't remember that part well, I honestly think I am making it up, but it was something like that. My mom came or my dad took her, something like that, but the point is that they found each other again. They reunited in Mexico City and she also decided to start the same career as him and that is when my older siblings were born. The oldest one is 38 years old, then it's my sister who is 36 and then my other brother who is 32, after that it's me, I am 26 and my other two brothers, who are twins, but one is a boy and the other is a girl, and they are both now 24 years old.

DBN: And did your parents ever take you to their native town?

JMT: Yes, actually, they would take us every year, they would take us especially for the festivities, if it was possible, two times a year, but if not, only one, but they would take us around the last days of holy week. They would take us around those times because, well his meat market would close due to holy week, people cannot eat meat, and also because they wanted for us to visit our grandparents. I never met my grandparents from my mother's side. From my father's side I only met my grandma, and I could not talk with her, we could not really communicate or understand each other because she would speak Nahuatl. [00:15:00] Well, I didn't really know the language, she did not know how to speak Spanish either, therefore we could not communicate. But every year we would visit them during holy week, and I really enjoyed going because things were pretty cheap. Everything was very cheap, and I bought a lot of candies and fireworks. They would have a great festivity in a church. It was something big and I don't know how to explain this part, I only have visions of it. The environment was very hot, walking there was extremely draining, but it was not suffocating, so the streets were still not paved, that is what I remember. I think that now they are paved. The houses were made out of huge blocks. If you touched one of the outside walls, they had dirt, they were made out of clay. You felt the thickness, you could walk on one side and you could tell that the thickness and the height of the walls were bigger. The wooden doors were huge. There were no steel doors, only some made from thick wood. The festivities consisted of the church setting up tents and chairs and they would make a huge procession, like the ones they make in Mexico City in Iztapalapa, they would make God's procession there. I remember that they would take us to mass and the cathedrals, I think they were cathedrals and not churches, because you would enter and the

ceiling and the walls were painted with a lot of different things, images of God and the Virgin Mary. The design that they had seemed from other places. They had a European design inside those cathedrals. I think that that is why they were very religious, very catholic. At the end, it was at night and around those times I remember that it would get dark and little devils would come out, people dressed as devils, dressed with red and with masks. They would come out to dance and they would come out with whips or cables and they would start dancing and everyone had to move back to not get accidentally hit. They danced, they jumped and they would whip the floor and the people would throw rice at them and five or six devils would come out to dance, another man would come out with an armor of a bull on him. They would turn on the bull and a lot of fireworks would pop. Then it would start to dance, and the bull would run around. I think that is the best experience that I have had and that is why I really liked visiting that place.

DBN: You just described all this symbolism of Catholicism, which is a [00:20:00] huge part of Mexican culture. How did you feel as a kid in regards to all of this, as you watched all those images, as you participated in all those events?

JMT: Yes, I think I liked it, I felt good. My parents are catholic, well my mom is catholic. My dad was catholic and then he switched to Christianity. I felt good. I think that at that age one has a more open mind or you take things differently. Therefore, I felt good. I feel that now if I go, everything that I have learned and that I have lived, the experience will be totally different and I would do everything in a different way. But in that time, I enjoyed being there, I was happy. The only thing that I did not like is that there were no stoves in that town, so all of the food that they would cook had to be cooked outside with wood. So, my grandma, she also did not have one, she died a couple of years ago. She had a huge piece of land, it was huge. She did not have electricity, so she would use candles all through the house. Half of the house was like the land, part of it was empty and the other part was the living space. I think that what I don't like is that I did not appreciate all of that in the moment, to not have electricity, to not be dependent on electricity, the food with the wooden campfire, and I think I did not appreciate it. I think that I did not appreciate it as I should have, now I feel like I appreciate all that a bit more, all the experiences that I lived. The smell of campfire wood, because when we would return to the city we had to wash the clothes because they smelled a lot like firewood. All of the houses used firewood, a lot of the places did.

DBN: You also mentioned that your grandma speaks náhuatl, right, your parents, do they speak Nahuatl?

JMT: Yes, kind of. I think they do speak it because they would communicate with my grandma. My dad speaks it more than my mom, but I have never asked him to show me. Recently, my mother I don't know why, but I have been appreciating all the indigenous culture and the language, so I have been asking my mom if she can show me a few words or since she would

communicate with my grandma, she has been talking to me with few of the words that she knows. Because my mom did not really know how to speak náhuatl until she spent a year taking care of my grandma, but she does not use it because in the town where she grew up, I think that there are not a lot of persons that speak náhuatl at this moment, therefore she does not use it.

DBN: What town are you talking about?

JMT: The town where they grew up, where they grew up in Puebla. Where my parents grew up, where my grandparents grew up. I think that if I ask my mom, she can find the city. I don't remember what the city is called. Just right now my mom bought a house there. So, she wants [00:25:00] to go back to her town one day.

DBN: Talking about the indigenous culture, when you were a kid, did that interest you, did it catch your attention, or how did you feel in regardS to that compared to now?

JMT: To be honest it didn't really catch my attention, it didn't interest me, and I feel that that is why I didn't really appreciate my grandma because due to the language we didn't have a strong bond. So, as a kid I think that I was completely ignorant of the culture or the culture of my parents and my grandparents and now I feel kind of bad for not being able to appreciate it in the moment. Right now I am trying to or I am appreciating all that and that makes me a bit happy, that at least I am changing my mentality, or my expression is changing. I am trying to or I am learning to love everything from where I come from. I think that is part of school, school tells us that being indigenous or speaking an indigenous language will not really take you anywhere. If you dress like that you need to be calmer amongst society and the opportunities will be scarce. I think that right now is the complete opposite, at least for me. I feel that right now having and knowing about your culture, from where you come from, and knowing to do certain things is very valuable, and the western story does not want to accept it and that all of us are talking all these languages, that are English, Spanish, these are colonizer languages, that have terrorized and massacred our culture. So having that and being able to learn from it makes me feel better, I don't know if better, but they make me establish a bond or allow me to connect or be able to learn why right now I do certain things that I am doing and to be able to understand my family and be able to love my family.

DBN: It is a good thing that you mentioned the part about education, about what they are showing you right now, that teaching you about certain languages and certain cultures is not necessary. What do you think about that and how was your experience going to elementary and middle school in Mexico?

JMT: Yes, I actually remember about this since kinder. I have some memories of kinder, not exactly. Basically, kinder and elementary were some of the most beautiful years of my life,

especially during the dia de muerto festivities and that is something that I think I have seen in my small town because I think my parents would celebrate it. They would decorate the streets. I am talking about Puebla, sorry that I keep going back. In Puebla they would paint the streets or they would decorate them, they would do it with flowers, whether it would be with petals, they would do it with wood chips and paint them [00:30:00] and then start decorating the streets, completely decorated. In each door they would put a circle and then a candle in the middle of the circle and they would draw a cross, or they would put different crosses depending on how many of their family member were deceased. So, they would put a cross, depending on the circle, if they had no dead family members then they would not put any crosses. But everyone would create a circle made of petals or whatever other things they would use, even stones, the candle and one other thing, which I cannot remember what it is, I think it was a glass of water that they would place outside too. But that is part, I was telling you about kinder and elementary, the day of the dead would look very different because they would use a classroom for the day of the dead to set up an offering and this classroom was one of the biggest classrooms and they would set up the offering. Around those days they would bring different people to present acts, whether they were theatre acts or something more professional. They would do it with their hands or with puppets. So, that was the part that I liked the most, being able to walk into a classroom and smell the fresh petals, flowers and fruits. That is the part that I most remember about elementary, especially kinder. In elementary, I think that the education was good but it was also really bad. It all depended on the teachers. I remember that in elementary my teachers, one at least, and I remember the names of the teachers, a lady was called Nancy and she was the meanest one, she was mean, short, super strict, therefore I did not like her at all. After her, I had a teacher, Maribel, in second grade. I really liked her because she would take her time. I had her for two years, second and third grade. Afterwards, I had another teacher, Crisóforo, very funny, somewhat tall. My teacher Maribel and Mr. Crisóforo were the ones that stayed in my memory because of the way they taught, in the form that they would tell me what to do, they were very funny, those were mean sometimes, and they would tell me, you have to do this and you have to do that. In the report cards in Mexico, especially in elementary, they would place personal comments, like, “you have to try harder, you do a good job”, and those things that they would comment, and I still remember, “you do a good job, you try your best.” I remember others in which other teachers would say, “you try hard, you do a good job but you are quite slow, try harder”, or, “don’t get too distracted” but this person, Nancy, and another professor would say, “you did not do this or that, you do not deserve the grade”, so this was very rude. Like I was telling you, the education depended on the teacher, whether it was good or bad. The education system in Mexico, at least between elementary and middle school, and I believe even in high school, are horrible. I think that it is also horrible because we don’t have to learn about our ancestors. They wouldn’t talk a lot about Mexico’s story. They would talk a lot about the Porfiriato, about the colonizers, about the revolution, [00:35:00] but they would not focus on the different languages that exist in that country. I have a friend that I am still in contact with since elementary and there are other friends that I could not recognize anymore. Middle school was

also horrible because the teachers would not care. I remember that one of the teachers would get to school and would show us a movie and we would do whatever we wanted. He was a science teacher. A Spanish teacher was good. I cannot remember his name, but he was good. He would get after us; he would give us advice and it was cool. But from there on, all the other teachers were no good.

DBN: What can you tell me about the teachers? What did you most appreciate? What are some of the values or lessons that they taught you? Did these make you appreciate them more? What was their general attitude towards education?

JMT: I think that the way in which I appreciate these teachers is the way of communication that they had with their students and with the parents. The way in which they left their lessons imprinted on me. Like I said, every teacher has a different teaching style and all of them are either good or bad but I also think that this depends on whether they were exposed or not to the stuff they were teaching. For me, what stayed with me forever, was that being a bit strict was good but it was also good to be funny. We should not always have a serious face. So, knowing that they could understand not only me, but my classmates as well and tell them, “You are not doing this correctly, but you need a bit more of work”, or sometimes they would tell the class “don’t get frustrated, go out and walk”. They would give us like 10 minutes, and we would go out and walk around the school, in the middle of the class, so that we could clear our mind. So all those small things are the things that have stayed with me.

DBN: Did you have a favorite subject? Were some more interesting than others in elementary, middle school or high school?

JMT: Yes, I think that one of my favorite subjects was physical education. I did not really like the teachers because they were also very strict, but being able to run and walk, I think that those were some of the most fun activities. I think that I liked physical education because I like soccer, and they would do tournaments within the classrooms. I also really like history, but like I tell you they did not really cover a lot of history. I think that they didn’t really like history, or maybe they didn’t learn a lot of history so a lot of what I was taught in elementary did not stick with me. All the history that I know now is because of all the research that I have done on my own. So yea, history, and Spanish class was also very fun because of the books, the stories that they had were entertaining. I remember that one was about a mouse [00:40:00] with huge feet and the first grade Spanish book is one of the most popular ones in Mexico. I don’t know if you all have seen it. It has a dalmatian on the cover and it is yellow. It is one of the most famous ones in schools and I think that unfortunately they continue using it. I think that is okay, but they have not updated their books, they are not changing. I criticize that, but that is something personal.



DBN: Did your brothers attend the same schools, if so, what were their experiences? Did they have experiences similar to yours?

JMT: My younger brothers did attend the same schools as me. I went to kinder and then I went to Rafaela Suarez Solórzano Elementary, then to Javier Barro Cierra Middle School and from there I went to high school. They also went to those schools. My older siblings went to other schools because when we were younger we lived in a different city, in another place of the state. We were living in the state of Mexico, which was closer to Neza, another zone. So, they grew up close to Neza and they had a different experience from mine. We grew up differently. As I was telling you all, my father had his meat market, he had up to seven meat markets at a time, so he had a lot of money and they bought their houses and they sold them. My siblings had different stuff and they had a rough time. They suffered a lot when they were young because my dad was an alcoholic so he would hit them a lot. He would make them work. My older siblings did not complete their education; they only finished middle school. So they had a totally different experience to mine. One of my older siblings, the one who is 32, he got run over by a bus on a bridge. He would use a bicycle and the bus ran him over. The bus was a route bus and he ran him over and left him in the hospital for at least a year and that is when my dad's businesses started going down because he had to pay for surgeries and all that. So the family business was falling due to all those expenses. My brother has a surgery from here until the lower part of his stomach and it looks like a fish bone. You can see the scar, [00:45:00] how they opened and stitched him up. He also has a crooked foot. But if you see him right now, he grew up like nothing. He looks completely healthy and walks perfectly fine. If you see him in the streets, you would not think that he was once hospitalized. My other brother also got run over but he only had a minor back injury. So, all of that happened because they had to start working at a young age. I have heard stories about them and how they would be alone in the meat market surrounded by knives. They tell me that people would come in and assault them and threaten them to get money and meat and later in the day, once my dad got home, he would punish them for allowing the robbery to happen. They lived surrounded by a lot of violence.

DBN: Did you experience any of that?

AI: I did not experience any of the violence. My parents have separated two times. The first time, my mom left to Puebla and did not come back until a year later. My experience has been totally different and sometimes I don't like this because I was treated as the special child. So I started to get the special treatment. They would buy me a lot of stuff and my older siblings were okay with this but when my younger siblings were born, I was still the favorite child and I saw how that distanced my parents and my siblings from each other. So, they would give me more things than my younger siblings. I have grown seeing the feelings of my siblings and I have been analyzing them, because at one point I want to be a school principal or open a school or make a change in Mexico's education system, so I have been analyzing all those points of views. The treatment

that they gave me, the treatment that they gave my older and younger siblings. I think that this special treatment did cause a rupture in the sibling relationship that we have, and it also affected me growing up. I don't like knowing that there was favoritism towards me. So, yeah, the treatment towards my siblings and I was totally different. We did not experience a lot of violence like my older siblings. We experienced a bit, but it was not like the one my older siblings would describe. My parents separated the second time when I was 10 years old and that was the last separation they had. [00:50:00] My mom moved to Puebla again and decided to never come back, so we all grew up with my older sister. She would take care of us, or my older brothers would take care of us. We would go with them. We have a strong bond, but we also have some sort of small hatred due to the favoritism. This favoritism caused some minor problems but yeah, I grew up with my older sister. We would call my older brothers and her, mapa, like ma from mama and pa from papa. We would combine both to call them, mapa.

DBN: As you are saying, despite all of that, you all were able to continue having a sibling bond, despite that hatred being there and a bit of resentment. Have you ever talked to your siblings or with your father about why that favoritism was present?

JMT: No, we have never talked about that. I would not know what to say.

DBN: Well, continuing, talking about your siblings, who was your favorite one? Which one of them was closest to you and what did you all do together growing up?

JMT: I would spend more time with my older sister and my older brother, the one that is 32. My sister was in charge of taking me to school or talk for me in school. She was the one that would sign my report cards, talk to the teachers and all that. Therefore, that is why I was closest to my older sister. We would go out on walks, she would take me to the street markets or walk me around the neighborhood close to our house, because she still lives there. Where I lived with them, there was a street market on Wednesdays, and we would always go. Sometimes we would only go to walk and just look around at all the new merchandise that was coming in. Other times, we would go buy music or we would go to walk, and we would purchase a popsicle. I have a stronger bond with my 32-year-old brother, I don't know why. He was the one that introduced me to music, to several bands that I know now. I was exposed to the music I play now, through him. He was the one that was almost in UNAM, but he got together with a girl, and they had a daughter, so he had to work; he did not study anymore. [00:55:00] He was another teacher figure for me because he would motivate me to read and teach me other things. I liked the stories he would choose for me. He would choose some entertaining stories. I read a lot about Greek mythology. I have tried to purchase that book, but it is too expensive, so I don't know how he acquired that book. He had it and we would talk a lot about Greek mythology. I actually have a person here in my background, it's anime, and we would talk a lot about them, "los caballeros del zodiaco". I would watch those cartoons with him. We watched this anime together and it was

very related to Greek mythology. We would play basketball; we would play in the arcade games. He did not take me to huge concerts, but he did take me to small ones in “faro oriente”, where they would offer music or theatre workshops. Sometimes I would work with him. He would drive and I liked being in the car with him, listening to music. When I would go on field trips, he would lend me his music player. It was not a Walkman, or a cassette player, it was like a phone, with a very small disc and he would lend it to me, and I would take his music. I think that I had a stronger bond with him.

DBN: Thank you for sharing those things that you enjoyed. Aside from that, are there any foods that you remember that you liked growing up?

JMT: Yes, there are a lot of foods. In Mexico there are many things and they are all very good. If I was alone, I would eat a huarache with chorizo. There were small stands and you could go there and get them. In more typical food, I really liked the huichotes. They are like seasoned chicken with different spices and I think that it is a typical plate or a more cultural plate. I love pozole. There is one thing that I cannot remember what it is called, but there were these small plants, they looked like small trees and you would wrap them in egg yolk and then you would eat them. I think we are not aware that in Mexico we eat a lot of vegetables. [01:00:00] We did not really eat meat. I liked zucchini, the Mexican plant.

DBN: I am curious, what did you want to be when you grew up?

JMT: What did I want to be, I don't remember what I wanted to be. I wanted to be an airplane traffic controller. I think that is what I really wanted to be. Aside from that, I don't remember what else I wanted to be.

DBN: Where did this interest come from?

JMT: I think that from a book. My parents had some encyclopedias and there were some books dedicated to airplanes and I would open those books and I would read them and look at the images. They would talk a lot about the birds and the airplanes.

DBN: I know that you talked a bit about this, we wanted to know, what type of values did your family instill in you, whether it was your parents or your older siblings?'

JMT: I think that the values were, be more open, more exposed, maintain an open mind, be nice, say hello to everyone, try to make friends and try to change the machismo mentality that my father had been trying to impose in my household. They really told me to change that mentality of thinking that I did not have to do anything at home because I was a man. They taught me the

value of being someone in life, of getting an education, to accomplish something more than they did.

DBN: Thank you, that definitely helps us understand a bit more about who you are and how you became who you are today. We wanted to explore another experience and this one has to do with your trip from Mexico to the United States. When did you first start talking about this, if you remember? Did you all discuss it or was this decision taken independently? How was the decision reached, or how did you as an individual reach this decision?

JMT: I think that decision was a bit funny. My two older brothers came over here, [01:05:00] they arrived in New York and then they moved to New Jersey and then they settled in D.C. and one day my father told me he wanted to see my brothers again. Several years had passed and we obviously missed them, so my father asked me if I wanted to see them again. I was 14 at the time and they told me that if I wanted to see them, we could on vacations and I agreed. One day, he told me that we had to talk to the school teachers to let them know that I was going to be absent for a whole month due to vacations, but we were really going to the United States to visit my brothers. I thought it was a lie and agreed; I did not know if we were really going to visit them. The day arrived and he told me that we had to go to Puebla to say our goodbyes. When we went to Puebla, he told me that in reality we were going to the United States and we were going to stay there for some time, that he did not know when we would return. So, my younger brother left with us and we left our sisters behind. We stopped in Puebla to say our goodbyes. We stayed in Puebla for about a week and all through that week we just played with our cousins and friends. On Saturday, my father let us know that we were leaving, and a tension started building up. We were sad and scared. Around ten at night they told us that we had to prepare our luggage, so we put everything in backpacks and then they went to leave us at the coyote's house. We started saying our goodbyes. It was already night, and I did not know what to tell my mother or sisters. Without uttering a single word, I felt the tension from all the eyes that laid on me. I could see my mother's teary eyes, as well as my sister's. We gave each other a hug and I remember telling them that I loved them a lot. We loaded into the car; I remember that when the car started driving off, my sisters and my mother went to the middle of the road to say goodbye. [01:10:00] They were crying. I did not really feel that bad at that time because I thought I was going to see them again soon. I thought I was only going to be gone for a year or two. That was my goodbye story. We crossed through the desert. My brother, my father and I were with a group of 30 people. From those 30 persons, a lot could not continue walking or they could not bear the physical and emotional weight they carried. A lot of the people decided to return to Mexico, so in the end we were only like 15 or 12 people. We took like a month to cross since we crossed through the desert. We saw a lot of things there, one of them was a human skull. In the mountains we saw drug traffickers crossing. It was very difficult because they would pass by our side, and they had huge guns and they were around ten people. The first three had guns, the other four were in the middle and they were carrying something, I don't know what they were carrying because they

had huge bags and the last persons also had guns and backpacks. They were in charge of the food, to prepare it and to feed them. So we would see that every time they would find a group of persons like us, they would separate the women from our group and they would take them someplace else. I do not know what they would do, maybe they abused them and then they would bring them back to our group. A lot of the women did not continue, they went back due to the abuse they received. Well, that is one part, from there we continued walking through the desert like for a week. I remember when my brother and I would remove the thorns from our knees, from our feet, due to the cacti and all that. We would help our father because he was falling apart. I think he was like 50 years old at that time, and we would help him carry his food backpack and his water supply. My brother and I we were 14 and 13, as we were coming, I remember helping other people who could not carry their own belongings. We would not eat during that time. [01:15:00] It was not because we didn't have food but because we didn't have time to eat. We would take extra care of the water because we were in a desert, and we had to conserve water or reduce the rate at which we were drinking it. The nights were cold and the days were very intense. I remember that in order to keep warm during the nights, we would sleep inside trash bags and we would sweat a lot and if we took them off we would be very cold. We had to endure all the sweat because if we would get out of the trash bags we could freeze to death. I remember getting to the final spot before we crossed the border. One time we were crossing and a helicopter passed by so the people got really scared and they started running. I remember the coyote telling us to stay put and to keep quiet and to throw ourselves on the ground. Dogs passed by us, the only thing that was covering us were some short bushes and the cacti that were surrounding us. Those were the only things that were covering us but they would only cover half of our bodies. We were all on the floor, including the coyote. As I was telling you, the dogs passed by, the helicopters and the cops and nobody saw us but they did see the others. After they left, we continued walking. I think we were hiding on the ground for about three hours waiting for them to leave. We continued and right before crossing the border, we were already in a ranch here in the United States, but we had to get to a road to get picked up. So, we were already here, we were on the desert and the coyote told us that we had to get to a mountain and on the other side of our mountain was the road that would lead us to our destination. He told us that we had to rest and below that mountain there was a resting lodge, and he told us that if anything were to happen, we could walk or run and we would all reunite in that small lodge. We were to stay there until the following day. He told us that we had all night to get there. We were all surprised because we couldn't explain how there would be a lodge in the middle of the desert. There was one, without electricity but it had candles, bottled water, food and we were able to spend the night there. The next day we were already waiting at the point where they were supposed to get picked up and we got picked up. My brother got taken first and then we had to wait another day because it was too hot for us to get picked up. They picked up a small group first and then they picked me up, [01:20:00] but before that, a small truck drove by announcing that they had been caught and everyone got scared. The coyote said that we had to stay there and he dug a hole in the ground to uncover a phone and he placed the phone that he

had there, replacing it. He made some calls and they came back for us and the first thing that we ate was a McDouble. So that is how I arrived to Arizona. That's how I came over here.

DBN: Then you crossed through Arizona.

JMT: Mhm

DBN: If you don't mind rewinding a bit to the beginning. From what you are telling us, I understand that you did not necessarily know what was being planned, right? At first, they told you that you were going on vacations and that you were going to return. How did you feel when you found out that it was possible that you would never return to Mexico, or at least not anytime soon?

JMT: When they told me that I was scared and a bit sad and at the same time I was happy. I was happy because I was going to be able to see my brothers and to be in a new country, but I was sad because I left my sisters behind, I left my school and the friends that I had. I did not get to say goodbye to any of them, I didn't say anything. It was difficult.

DBN: Once you were aware of everything, did you accept it immediately or was it in the trajectory of the trip, because you do tell us that it took you like a month to complete it?

JMT: Yes.

DBN: So, in your trajectory did your perception change, or did something change during the trip?

JMT: What changes are you referring to?

DBN: Yeah, about how you felt about all of that. Did you still feel that eagerness that you had to see your brothers, or were you doubting those feelings now? Did those emotions change at all?

JMT: No, I was still excited. I think my emotions started changing once I was settled here, after some months of being here is when all these nostalgic memories came back, when I realized that I was not going to see my family in a long time. My emotions did not really change as I was coming here but after being here for some months, I realized that I was not going to see several persons, several of my friends in quite some time. It was also difficult because I felt a lot of nostalgia. I had good friends, I had good friendships. My sister would tell me that my friends would go visit me or they would pass by. They would call me by my last name. [01:25:00] My sister says that for an entire year my friends would pass by shouting my name, asking "are you coming out" or something like that. They would ask if I was going to go back to school, or things

like that. That was one of my biggest nostalgias, something that hit me hard. I regret not saying goodbye. I felt very appreciated by my friends. They became my sister's friends and they would visit her and ask her about me, and then I would call home and was able talk to them for hours [laughs].

DBN: In all of this, where was your younger brother, how was he doing?

JMT: I think that we both had a lot of similarities in regard to school and our friends. He is not here anymore, he returned to Mexico due to some personal reasons but we were together in this country for several years, almost 5 years. About three years ago, we decided to not live together anymore, so we each went our separate ways.

DBN: Once you got here, what were some of the first places you went to before getting to your destination?

JMT: What do you mean, once we got here?

DBN: Yes

JMT: Well we went across the country to get here to D.C. We were travelling by bus, we stopped in several states. We switched buses in Las Vegas and then in Colorado, from there we went to Baltimore and then they went to pick us up in Baltimore. The first thing we did was go and eat in a Mexican restaurant and from there we got to D.C, to 18th street and Columbia Road. That is where we lived, on top of the Spanish corner.

DBN: You said your two older brothers had already been here for two years, right?

JMT: Yes.

DBN: What were they doing during those two years?

JMT: They were working at a restaurant. They would both work in the same restaurant doing different things. They were busboys in Buffalo Beers, that is in Dupont Circle and in James Mackies, which is also close to Dupont Circle.

DBN: Are you aware of how they decided to come to the United States before you guys?  
[01:30:00]

JMT: No, honestly they both came here because they had children. They told me that they had an easier crossing experience and that it was quicker.

DBN: Okay, so it has not been a long conversation.

JMT: No.

DBN: How did you see your father during the trip? You mentioned that he had a difficult time due to his age.

JMT: Yes, he struggled due to his age, because he is diabetic also and he struggled with that too. Even here, he struggled to find a job. My brothers got him a job, but he could not get used to it and he would have a lot of accidents. He would burn himself, cut himself and he could not find the adequate medicine so that would make him weaker. He returned to Mexico, well all my brothers have left, I am the only one left here. My dad left, one of my brothers left first, then my dad and then my older brother. He got together with a Salvadorian, and they moved to Texas, so he is over there and my other brother, the youngest one, he left too. I am alone in D.C.

DBN: What were your first impressions when you first got to D.C, or even when you arrived in the country?

JMT: Well I quickly thought about starting school, about working, about doing other things, about meeting friends. All of these impressions came from shows that I would watch in Mexico, and they depicted school in a specific way. One of these shows was Drake and Josh. I would watch Zoey 101, I am embarrassed, but I would also watch iCarly. So those shows made me have a certain image of school and the environment in this country. It was a completely different reality.

DBN: What is one of the realities or differences that has impacted you the most?

JMT: Discrimination, racism, violence against the rights of people, the access to Jobs and education for people.

DBN: Once you got here, how long did it take you to start school again and develop a new routine?

JMT: It took me about three years. It took me that long because we were alone with my two brothers and my father and my father struggled to find a job, so we didn't have a lot of help. To enroll in school, it took me one year. During my first year in the United States, I was only at home with my brother, and we would occasionally go out [01:35:00] and walk and my older brothers were working all the time. They got me a job as a dishwasher, which was my first job at 16 years old. Then at my job my brother asked, because I told him that I wanted to go to school,



and we were asking around and initially they were going to enroll me at “Net Step” or at Carlos Rosario. But a lady from work said, “no, don't enroll him there, those are schools for adults or schools for youth who are working or doing other things”. She said “they’re still young, you should still try to enroll in one of the public schools”, and that is when we decided to go to Wilson. So, I went to Wilson high school.

DBN: What grade did you finish in Mexico, because you mention that you started high school right away, had you already finished middle school in Mexico?

JMT: No, actually, I was going to my second year of middle school, I did not finish it and because of my age I could not enroll in middle school here because I was already 16 years old. So, they sent me directly to high school. My brother did enroll one year in middle school and then he moved to high school.

DBN: Once you were in school, what were the things that you encountered that were different to your expectations and what were some that were similar to what you expected?

JMT: Well the division of schools, the division of the teachers and the division of the subjects and the access to classes. I had to take English classes to learn, so they had me mixed with other persons, apart from regular classes. We would take the basic levels until 11th grade when I could finally communicate better. So at first, in 9th and 10th grade, the resources were very limited. I think that the division that exists in education, its structure here is wrong.

DBN: Can you talk a bit about that, how is it badly structured or what are the divisions that you have seen.

JMT: Yes, in 2014 I decided to join an organization that is called Many Languages One Voice, and I decided to join it for my brother, because after school we would all go out together and we would come home to play video games. One day, my brother and his friends did not arrive. So three days passed by and they would not arrive at my house after school, they would get there later. I would ask them where they were and they would tell me that they were in an organization with a group that they met. Then one day I decided to go with them [01:40:00] and they had a group that was called, S.M.A.R.T., Student Multi Action Research learning Team, such a long name. It took me a long time to learn the name. There they would talk about immigrant rights, especially about student rights. They would talk about how education would affect the learning experience of an immigrant student here. How not having access to certain subjects or classes limits their learning experience and the ability to pursue a better career, or to continue with a mentality that allows them to pursue a university education. So, I went to their organization, and we talked about the rights and about the changes we could bring about. One thing that we talked about was that in 2014, that same year, we decided to start a student protest and we were able to

make them establish summer classes for ESL students. Because what would happen was that if you did not pass the exams to continue climbing up in the English language, you had to repeat the school year. You would be behind in school and a lot of students would graduate at 22 or 23. D.C. says that you can be in a public school until you are 21, if you are older then you cannot attend one, but if you are younger you can enroll again. So, a lot of people would graduate being 22 or 23 years old and it they would sometimes feel bad for graduating at an older age. They also did not have resource, or they would not encourage them to continue pursuing higher education. So, we went to speak with the lady, Kay Anderson, who was the chair of education in D.C at that moment. We put together a theater show in one of her conferences and we told her that we needed for them to open summer classes for ESL students. That was when a lot of ESL students that were learning English, could take summer classes or exams to motivate them and graduate at an earlier age. So now, instead of graduating at 22 or 23, students were graduating at 19 or 20. So now the ages were being reduced and there were more opportunities, not only in English, but also in mathematics or in science. So those were the subjects that we could enroll in as students. From there, we were aware of how bad the education system really was. We became aware that the school lunches were provided by the same company that provides lunches to the prison systems. [01:45:00] We were fighting for that. The zone divisions were also here in D.C and the lotteries, in which if you did not have good grades, you could not change from schools. If you were not here and you lived in North West or passing the boundaries, if you passed by the other side of the street or the zone, they would tell you that you could not attend Wilson, you had to go to Roosevelt. If you wanted to enroll at Wilson or another school, you had to go through a lottery process, that was not very difficult, but for immigrant persons, especially for parents who did not understand the language, it was a bit difficult and well at the end they would end up sending their kids to Roosevelt, which is a school for adults, and they would send a lot of them over there. We were also placing teachers or liason persons in schools so that they could guide the new students and at the same time be at the parent's meetings because a lot of the parents from here would not go to the meetings because they did not know how to communicate with the teachers, and it was very uncomfortable for the student to be translating for the parents whenever they would get bad grades. They could not tell their parents that they were not doing their work. If the teacher was getting after you, you could not necessarily translate it. So, we would fight for that and also because it is not fair that there is a budget in D.C. that is destined for the Language Access Hotline, but the teachers and the administration, as well as the agencies, do not use it and it is a lot of money and it is just wasting away. Sometimes, there isn't even money, the law is there but there is no funds for that law. It is worthless because it is there but there is no access to it. So, all of those things are what took me to see why the education system from here is so bad. There is no motivation towards the immigrant student population, nobody tells them that they have to continue with college. The teachers would not motivate you. Since I went to school, I cannot remember a single immigrant person who enrolled in an AP course, they were not accessible to them. They did not care if you knew a lot or if you qualified, they would not consider you simply for not speaking English right. They would limit you a lot.

DBN: Ever since you first started attending school here, did you see the differences or was it something that you became aware of one you joined the S.M.A.R.T. group?

JMT: I became aware of all that when I was in the group because at the beginning I thought that it was normal. At the beginning I thought that everyone had the same education but once I got engaged with the group and I started analyzing all the points of views and seeing how the classes and the teachers were trained, I started to put everything together. [01:50:00] For example, the English teachers did not care, they would give the literature class, but they would not teach enough. The teacher would not learn from the students, so there were really no subjects or content to give to the students so that they could study or could learn better. Yeah, with this group I became aware of how the school was internally divided because there were sections of white students that would only walk through one side, African American students that would walk through another side and the you had the Latinos that were on their side. You also had a section of student ambassadors because the Wilson school had the majority of the international students, they came from ambassadors, they were politicians. A certain percent came from immigrant persons that were working and doing other things.

DBN: How did you feel that you could fit in all of that, in that environment in a totally different demographic, how you say, something that you were not used to in Mexico. How did you react to all of this, to seeing the notable divisions?

JMT: Like I was telling you, at the beginning I was not aware, I thought it was normal. You have all these stereotypes that you carry coming from people from this country or from Mexico. One of the stereotypes is that African American persons are mean or dirty, without knowing them. Like I told you at the beginning I did not become aware of that until I joined the S.M.A.R.T. group and they started teaching me all of this and exposing me to it. We unraveled the education system as we analyzed it from different forms. We unraveled the oppression system, how the oppression was involved in the education system and the movements. A lot of the movements that I witnessed were the Chicano movements and the Filipino movements in California. A lot of the Filipinos worked in the agricultural fields in California. I think a lot of the organizers or the teachers that were in that organization were teaching us everything. I obtained a lot of my values from there, from the people that I have encountered and I have been able to further understand the oppressive system and how it keeps the poor person, poor.

DBN: You say that at the beginning you joined due to your friends, right? Did they decided to join, and you followed them?

JMT: I decided to join because I followed them. After two meeting I thought, why am I here? This is not going to benefit me at the end of the day, next year I am going to return to Mexico,

and this is not going to be any good for me. But look now where I am now and after some months of joining them, [01:55:00] I decided to return and stay to analyze all of these things. I also saw this as an opportunity to continue in education since my teachers would not motivate me to continue in education. The coworkers in that group would talk a lot about universities and the courses. So, I felt bad because I realized that nobody had those talks with me. My brothers never talked about college with me, they wanted me to work. So, I motivated myself. I told myself, if they are doing it, why can't I. A lot of the times I felt alone because I did not have the same resources as them. I don't have DACA, I don't have any type of legal documentation that allows me to obtain a job or go to college. Even if I get accepted into a university, I don't have the proper money to pay for tuition. It has been very difficult but not impossible because thanks to all of this, I am building connections and meeting people that have informed me about the process. I am looking at other alternatives through this program because now I am working with them as an organizer in training. I was working at a bar when I was in high school. I would work at the bar at night and during the day I would attend high school. I would work from four in the afternoon to two in the morning every day. I would get home and fall asleep and then leave for school at eight thirty in the morning. I thought about leaving school at one point, but I decided to continue. I talked to my teachers, and they also became aware of the great effort I was making. At times I would not turn in my homework like regular students did, I would turn it in during class time or during lunch. During my lunch times I would only go to the cafeteria to pick up my lunch and then return to the classroom to have one on ones with my teachers. Whenever I did not work, I would stay behind in school until 8 at night and talk to my teachers or catch up on homework and exams. I was able to graduate high school and complete everything. Since I had done a lot of work during my junior year, when I was a senior I was able to have a free period. So, I did not have a class and I would use that free period to talk to my teachers. I remember that before the graduation ceremony they would make a small conference for the students, [02:00:00] without parents or anything like that, to give out awards. In one of those award ceremonies one of the administratives asked me if I was going and I said no and they told me I had to go and they gave me a pin and asked me to wear it if I did go. I was not going to go but during the last minute I decided to go. We had to dress in white, I don't know why. I did not have white clothes so I went in black clothes. While there, a teacher gave a super long speech and a lot of the students were crying and I told one of my friends that I thought they were talking about him in the speech. We were whispering and when I told him that, he started crying. At the end, they mentioned my name so it turns out they were talking about me, not him. I was shocked because it was a public recognition. I decided that I was not going to go to the graduation ceremony because I had to work and I needed to save money for other things. I did not want to waste money on a suit. The school found out and they decided to buy me a suit, along with other things, they paid for my tickets also. I felt very supported by my school. I realized that even though the D.C education system is very bad, there are still people out there that are trying to support students and motivate them to do better and make a change in them.

DBN: One of the things that caught my attention was that you mentioned that you were different at the beginning when you joined SMART, that you practically joined it because of your friends. Do you have a memory of when you joined the group? Did you realize that they were really trying to have important conversations with you and then this led to you becoming motivated?

JMT: Yes, I was motivated through one of the conversations they were having about higher education and how immigrants don't really have access to it and all the oppressive systems here. This organization was not only focusing on education, they were also focusing on jobs. Our group would go out and motivate restaurant workers [02:05:00] and do protests and we would talk and take action. One thing that really made us realize the impact we were having was that we were all diverse students from different countries, yet not one of us could properly speak English. There was a person from Cameroon, another one from Cambodia, one from Ethiopia, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, Vietnamese, it was like a huge clash of cultures, and we all decided to stay. I still am in contact with those people. Those persons with whom I shared my battles and my joy, became my family. I enjoyed being exposed to other cultures. I realized that other cultures have different problems in different ways.

DBN: Have you ever been exposed to the Latino term in the past or was this something new or how did you start listening to it?

JMT: I started hearing it in school, I was not familiarized with that term. I think that that term is not necessarily bad. In school they would call us the "Spanish speakers" and we would tell them that we were not Spanish, we would say that we were Latinos or Mexicans.

DBN: So you did identify with that term, or how did you feel about it?

JMT: Well, yeah I do identify because I have had to write it down in several documents.

DBN: Everything that deals with categories and labels is a little bit strange. That is exactly why we are doing this project because we want to find out more about how the perceptions about the term dreamer have changed. We wanted to know if you have been exposed to these terms and know something?

JMT: Yes, I was exposed to these terms through the organizations. Several of my coworkers have DACA but they don't identify as dreamers, they are doers and persons of action. I always say, a dreamer is someone who dreams and the dreams if you don't take action they just stay there, being dreams. So why do we have to dream about a better future when we can make it happen or why do we have to be named "dreamers" when we actually get stuff done. So we have to see that perspective and try to change it and see how a lot of the Latina persons have a good focus and they contribute to the economy and bring a good flavor to this country [02:10:00] yet

the white people are saying they don't do any of this. The system is not agreeing with the obvious.

DBN: So do you think that the labels were there from the beginning or were they slowly developing?

JMT: Yes, that slowly developed in me. I used to go and still go to all the DACA protests. I also wanted to see what opportunities were available for me because I didn't qualify for DACA or anything, I don't have any papers. So as I saw the different abilities available, everything started changing. Also the organizers changed because all these new terms started emerging. We are looking at the queer term to see how much we can involve ourselves or how queer we can be since we have a very delicate situation. Every year there is a new term that emerges and one that disappears.

DBN: You are right. Going back to your involvement, I feel that you have always been very involved since you got here or sometime after. What has been your progress in involvement and is that still one of your main priorities or are there other priorities that have emerged through this?

JMT: Yeah, I think that activism struck me since I was a child through music. My brother introduced me to a band named "escape", and other ones, but this band in specific talked a lot about injustices. If you look for their music, all of it is based on injustices. They talk about racial injustice, animal injustice, the rights, and several other things. Through this my activism was developing within me. Also, once I was in the organization, I started realizing that I wanted to be involved in activism.

My mentors have been teaching me the difference between being an activist and being an organizer. I do not consider myself an activist right now, I consider myself an organizer because in activism you are simply supporting the cause and you are with a foot in the fight, but as an organizer, you are more involved with the community, you know what is happening because you have lived it, you are doing all of these things because maybe you or your family member went through it and that is why as an organizer you become more involved. So activism is more like supporting and the organizer is more like empowering the people, [02:15:00] you are organizing the people. All this came from me being in an organization. Like I was telling you, I started as organizer in training and then I became the youth organizer for the group and right now I am working for another group that focuses on restaurants and opportunities and I am with them because I worked in restaurants, and I know all of the injustices that take place in those places, and I know that a lot of Latinos do not know their rights. They don't know if they are stealing their money or not. A lot of the time, people are scared to fight for their rights because they fear

not knowing the language. A lot of the employers take advantage and exploit the workers and the people.

DBN: Now that you mention that you are working, and because you have mentioned it in other conversations, we know that one of your interests is education and the organizing aspect has been an opportunity that came abroad and you took it. What is your role in all this organizing matter, how is this connected to your dream of becoming an educator?

JMT: Yes, organizing in a way is like being a teacher. I am actually learning how to use popular education in all of this, because when you organize, everyone can do a form of movement, but the purpose is to put thought and power in all that you do, to empower people. One can mobilize people, and a lot of people think that that is organizing, but it is just mobilizing. I am learning a lot about popular education as an organizer. Popular education is managed by white people, people with knowledge. For example, there is this man, Pedro Petri [Paulo Freire]. He is the founder of popular education because he was teaching indigenous communities literature and language. He says that he was teaching them and organizing them to obtain an opportunity without really realizing that they had their own language. He did not realize that the English and Spanish languages were the oppressive languages. For, if you do not speak English or Spanish, your opportunities diminish. [02:20:00] If you do not have an education, your opportunities are scarce. There are no opportunities for people that speak other languages, like the indigenous. Popular education builds off our own experiences, of how we utilize our language, it talks about your ancestors, and the way you move, the way you walk, and the way you carry yourself. We see all this, and we analyze it. There are a lot of people that have this understanding that if you dye your hair blonde you are going to be placed in a certain category. If you buy a car, you are already in a different economic category and all this stems from the same problem, of how we live. A lot of persons think that popular education is just literature, that Che Guevara did all of that, that Fidel Castro did all of that but they don't recognize that indigenous people were also fighting for this movement. One of the things that is very clear to me is that I am not a follower of the Che Guevara movement. One because he abused a lot of people, you must really dig in history, but he was an alcoholic, he abused women and other persons. He would utilize alcohol as an escape. So I wanted to change something and do something different and symbolic. I am not someone who will continue the fight and just criticize. So I want to be an organizer who uses popular education, the one that our ancestors have brought, to see how the indigenous languages have survived. This has been through the education that these small towns have had to disperse their knowledge.

Norma Sorto: So I just have this one question. So in the beginning you mentioned that D.C. doesn't really have a culture how you were describing your culture back home. So now that you're living in D.C. how are you bringing your own culture in D.C. and sharing that with other people around you like your neighbors and stuff?

JMT: Yeah, I guess the way I bring my culture over here is by participating in different events. One of them is The Day of the Dead in Mount Pleasant. I've been participating in that event for the past three years and just to being part and also supporting the street vendors in Columbia Heights that's how to build resistance because the street vendors get attacked by DHS, by the police, and they get tickets, so we have to come and go there to help them to interpret or bring people [02:25:00] or even what I'm doing right now with the group that I'm working. I'm working with a group of almost thirty señoras, thirty ladies and they all work in the restaurant industry and because through this pandemic they have to survive in different ways, so I'm organizing with them, trying to expose them to a different ideas, we are going over the systems of oppression with them and so they can be awake and at the same time as we do any type of protests we try to bring culture in that protest. For example, two days ago we have a meeting, a protest for cancel rent in D.C., so we used a vigil and we used candles and we were doing singing and in a lot of the protests we use music so artists, a Son Jarocho band, are being invited to play and just to used different aspects and different ways to make music, make theater, talking to people is a way to bring culture and yeah. Also, I will also have to go at 2 p.m. I don't know if there is more questions but also I'd be down to do a second following after this.

DBN: Yes, if that's what you'd like that's fine.

JMT: Okay, thank you.

DBN: I'm going to give the floor to Jose because I know we have ten minutes left and I want him to be able to ask questions so we can get used to this process. Jose, if you want you can ask him a question.

Jose Mendoza: My question is, being an organizer, when have you realized the impact of your work, whether it is with a person or the community, and how do you think that these impacts have motivated or changed the way you organize?

JMT: I have changed in different ways. I have changed in understanding and exposing people to their rights. A lot of people know their rights and they know what to do and what not to do, especially at their job. Right now we are working on two campaigns, one for the excluded workers and one for cancelling rent. We are all fighting to cancel rent. The people are learning about politics and about community counseling. They are learning how to use a budget and how to sort out finances. Like this, people are able to understand their rights. We are also exposing their children to be more open to these things because things are continuously changing. We are asking for 200 million dollars to help undocumented people, sex workers, people without a stimulus check and those that have been in prison or are barely leaving prison and reintegrating [02:30:00 themselves into society. We are seeing how this movement is causing an impact on the



people. It is bringing us all together. As we see all of these changes we are able to grow and unite.

JM: You talk a lot about how people understand each other and how they understand their environment. Do you think you are seeing changes in the internet or in technology or in the forms that people are able to see their culture in another perspective, in terms of the new communication methods that are surfacing?

JMT: With all this new technology and the internet changes that are surfacing, I have learned that we must use the internet in a positive way. With the virtual meetings and the technology, I have been able to expose a lot of people to the movement and its cultural growth, starting from its roots, to how it has expanded, not only here, but in Bolivia, Colombia, and Ecuador, how these movements are passing boundaries. How the dances, the rites, the form of culture that has come from our ancestors has progressed. I have been able to use videos and show them to the people to eliminate all the stereotypes that exist.

One of the main things that education does is that it creates stereotypes, or the teachers create stereotypes in persons. Because a lot of persons are not exposed, they believe, oh African Americans are this way or they say, why are we going to speak to those Indians or oh I am more white than them. So, I like being able to break down those stereotypes through technology and the other sources. A lot of the stereotypes have to do with skin tone and people not liking each other because of this or because of their style of hair. So, we are not trying to break the basic stereotypes but also the broader ones.

JM: Do you have a specific inspiration, a role model that models the ideas that you want to instill in others?

JMT: I have a lot of role models, famous and not famous. One of them is Malcolm X, he is one of the persons that has instilled values in me. Bertha Cázares is from Honduras, the movement of the Filipinos and Mexicans in California and the Mexican movement of the Adelitas. An organization called Movement Matters has also instilled a lot of values in me, they are organizers and now they are consultants, [02:35:00] but they helped the gentrification movement a lot. The values that they taught me are still here. They taught me how to use popular education and how to use the abilities I have to create change.

DBN: Thank you. Thank you all too for being here and assisting with this interview and this process. Since I know everyone needs to go, if you want we can continue at another time because there are some topics we still want to cover and capture who you are as a person. So we'll be in touch to see what dates we can continue talking.

JMT: That sounds fine.

DBN: And if you have any questions for us, you can get in touch with us or let us know next time too.

JMT: Okay: perfect.

DBN: Thank you, we'll be in touch.

JMT: Yes, thank you. Goodbye

DBN: Take care.

JMT: Goodbye.

[End of interview] [02:37:02]